

# SCOTLAND'S STORY

23

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**A bold march on oatmeal to victory**

**A Devil of a panic, when 'witches' were for burning**

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# TIMEBAND Part 23





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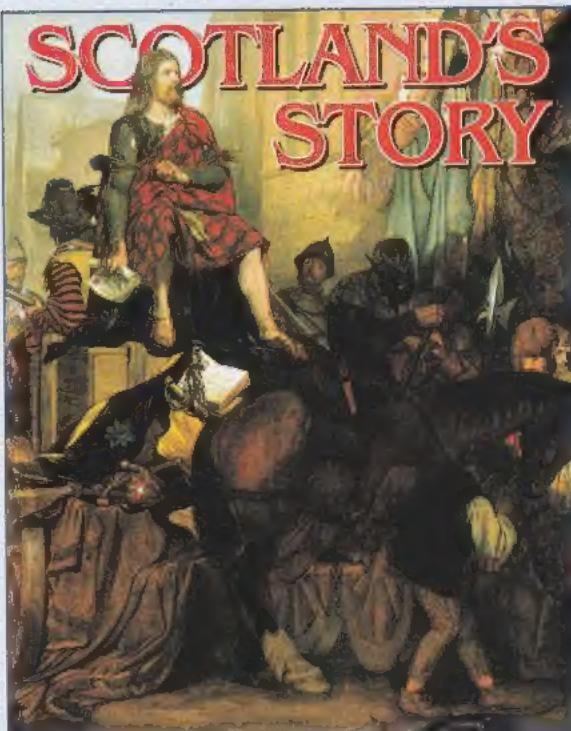
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## COMMENT



**COVER:**  
The Marquis of Montrose is paraded through the streets of Edinburgh, before his execution.

## The Royalists' reign of terror

The alliance of the Marquis of Montrose and Alasdair MacColla is considered by many to be one of the most effective military partnerships in modern Scottish and British history. The story of their combined exploits is one of remarkable courage, skill and derring-do, but interestingly neither of them fared particularly well in their solo military commands.

The Montrose-MacColla campaigns took place against a backdrop of three overlapping civil wars in Scotland, England and Ireland. As the conflict raged across the British Isles, Scotland often found itself playing the centre-stage role.

This high-pressure situation owed much to the fact that Scotland was, in many respects, a buffer zone between the other two nations; geographically, culturally and politically.

Witchcraft is often popularly conceived in terms of covens of 'gnarled old hags' dressed in black cloaks and hats, riding on sticks and attending secret meetings with the Devil. But while it is true that

almost ninety percent of those victimised by accusations of witchcraft were women, the fantastic imagery evoked by the term 'witchcraft' almost certainly resulted from the method of torture commonly used to extract confessions from them – sleep deprivation.

Such tortures led not only to the victims 'confessing' to having been 'in league wi' the Deil', but to terrible hallucinations.

An infamous time of year, when witches have long been thought to be abroad in the countryside, is of course Hallowe'en – or Samhain in Gaelic. Calendar customs and festivals have formed an essential part of life in Scotland since the earliest times in our human history. In the 16th and 17th Centuries, however, the reformed Church became determined to eradicate customary folk practices, and there are many records of official intolerance of cultural traditions. But the people had different ideas, and communities across Scotland still continue to joyfully celebrate their festival days.

# Montrose's tour de force

**When the Marquis of Montrose dedicated his military genius to the King's cause, the Covenanting armies had good reason to recoil. He and alliance partner Alasdair MacColla registered six crushing victories before their onslaught was stopped in its tracks in 1645**

The outbreak of hostilities in England and Ireland and the political, ideological and military commitments of the Covenanters on a British basis were to place Scotland as a potential zone of military conflict in the wider British struggle.

After the Cessation of Arms in Ireland in September, 1643, important decisions were taken in 1644 by which an Irish Catholic military force of 2,000 men was to be sent to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to attack the Marquis of Argyll's

territory. In the event, 1600 Irish troops landed on the Ardnarmurchan peninsula in July, 1644, under the command of Alasdair MacColla, a kinsman of Randal MacDonnell, second Earl and later first Marquis of Antrim, and a member of the southern branch of Clan Donald.

The majority of the Irish force was from Antrim's estates in north County Antrim and north County Londonderry, and by the time of their arrival the Covenanters had already suppressed Sir John Gordon of Haddo's Royalist rising in the



■ The English Civil War began in 1642 when Charles raised his standard in Nottingham. Scotland was aloof until 1643 when Covenanters joined Parliament

# force

THE MONTROSE CAMPAIGNS  
1644-5, 1650

(from Gothenburg)

north-east of Scotland. MacColla and his Irish brigade were to fight under the command of the Royalist Lieutenant General, James Graham, fifth Earl and first Marquis of Montrose, against the Covenanters.

MacColla had fought in the Catholic armies of the early 1640s in Ireland; he already enjoyed a formidable reputation as a Gaelic warrior; and many of his men had served in the Catholic armies of continental Europe.

MacColla teamed up with Montrose in Blair Atholl, from where they proceeded to unleash their reign of terror on Covenanter armies throughout 1644 and 1645.

The impact of the Montrose-MacColla military alliance was almost immediately successful and their forces inflicted six crushing military victories over Covenanter armies in that period: Tippermuir near Perth (September 1, 1644), Aberdeen (September 13, 1644), Inverlochy (the present-day Fort William, on February 2, 1645), Auldearn (May 9, 1645), Alford (July 2, 1645) and Kilsyth (August 15, 1645).

MacColla's Irish forces formed the backbone of the Royalist army at four of these battles and it was only at Alford and Kilsyth that Scottish Royalists outnumbered their Irish counterparts.

While the alliance was clearly effective in the short term, Montrose and MacColla had different objectives – objectives which were to weaken the Royalist cause over the longer term.

First and foremost, Montrose sought to defend the king and fight for his cause. Therefore, Montrose sought to win Scotland for the King and a political settlement could be reached which redressed the radicalism which had so alienated Montrose in the early 1640s.

Military strikes against the Covenanters in their homeland was also expected to help the King's cause in England by forcing the withdrawal of Covenanter troops from England.

A decisive military victory in Scotland would also allow Montrose to enter England to fight for the King and save him from defeat there.

But MacColla's main interest



was on the western seaboard and MacDonald revenge on the House of Argyll and Clan Campbell for territorial expansionism in that sphere of influence.

The loyalty of MacColla's Irish troops was to the Irish Catholic Confederation which had sent them to Scotland – and there was also a vital religious dimension in the sense that the Irish troops were also fighting as part of a Catholic crusade against Protestant heretics.

These were important factors which would ultimately weaken Montrose's ability to raise troops in Scotland, and the use of Irish Catholic troops on Scottish soil was

viewed with distaste and alienated political support from sections of the Scottish nobility.

The sacking and looting of Aberdeen by Irish troops over three days in September, 1644, did much to reinforce an emerging ethnic stereotype of the 'bloody' and 'barbarous' Irish. Montrose's army was quartered in Argyllshire in the winter of 1644 and inflicted severe devastation.

Roughly 18 parishes in Argyllshire and Breadalbane were burned and destroyed in November, 1644, and 900 Campbells of military age were estimated to have been slaughtered.

During the winter of 1645 the

districts of Lorne, mid-Argyll and Cowal were devastated by MacColla in a second campaign of destruction. Plundering was so bad that the Marquis of Argyll was unable to raise any rents from his Argyllshire estates between 1644 and 1647.

In military terms, however, a crucial strategy was used which helps to explain the impressive run of Royalist victories. This was the infamous 'Highland Charge'.

It appears to have been first used by MacColla in Ulster at the Battle of Lally in February, 1642, when he was fighting for the Irish rebels. It was then adapted by MacColla for use in Scotland and was also later



■ The Battle of Philiphaugh, near Selkirk, where Montrose's long string of victories came to an end as his alliance's differing objectives came to light.

## The Covenanters took revenge on the Irish troops, killing many after their surrender

► used as a Highland tactic in the later Jacobite rebellions of 1689, 1715 and 1745-6. The Highland Charge upset the military norms of the day, especially concerning the use and effectiveness of musket fire.

Usually, an advancing army would move to within one musket-shot of the enemy. The advancing army would then fire a single volley to which the opposing army would return fire with a volley of its own.

After this initial fire, both armies would then reload and then continue to exchange volleys, either remaining where they were or beginning to advance on each other.

MacColla's Highland Charge followed a different procedure. His troops would fire a single volley, then drop their muskets and charge the opposition with broadswords and targes (round wooden shields).

Covenanting armies, time and time again, proved unable to deal with this tactic and the Covenanters suffered their heaviest losses being cut down in retreat from the onslaught of Highland and Irish troops. The racial and ethnic

overtones of the Montrose Rebellion were apparent in Gaelic poetry of the time, which elevated Alasdair MacColla to hero status as the saviour of the Gael and the slayer of the Campbells. One notable example of this was in the poetry of the MacDonald bard of Keppoch, Ian Lom, who celebrated the martial skills and superiority of MacColla and Clan Donald at the Battle of Inverlochy on February 2, 1645.

At least 1500 Campbells were wiped out at the battle and Lom gleefully noted that "when the great work of blood-letting came to a height at the time of unsheathing slender swords, the claws of the Campbells lay on the ground with their sinews severed and torn".

Montrose's string of victories came to an end at the Battle of Philiphaugh near Selkirk on September 13, 1645. By this time the different objectives of Montrose and MacColla were coming to light and in military terms the Royalist cause was being weakened.

Within two weeks of having roughly 5,000 troops at Kilsyth, Royalist numbers had been reduced to less than 1,000 with the withdrawal of Highlanders to their homelands and the Gordons to the North-East.

To pursue his anti-Campbell crusade, MacColla was crucially concentrating his attention on the western seaboard. Montrose's use of Catholic Irish and Highlanders made

it extremely difficult to recruit in the Lowlands, whereas a force of 6,000 Covenanting veterans returned from England to annihilate Montrose's forces at Philiphaugh on September 13. The Covenanters took their revenge on the Irish troops present, with many executed after they had surrendered. Nearly all of the prisoners taken were shot and many of the wives and children of the Irish soldiers were also executed.

Two of the leading Irish officers at Philiphaugh, Colonel Manus O'Cahan and Major Thomas Laghtan were later executed in Edinburgh on October 20, 1645. Montrose escaped to Europe later in 1646 and MacColla continued his campaign in the western seaboard before retreating to Ireland in 1647 where he was killed in action as a lieutenant general in an Irish Confederate army defeated at Knocknanuss; but the Montrose Rebellion was essentially over.

The political repercussions of the Montrose Rebellion were dealt with by the Scottish Parliament, which initiated a process of purging and fining of collaborators of Montrose.

A 1646 Act of Classes laid down the amounts of fines and forfeitures, while Montrose was declared a rebel and traitor. In terms of the wider British picture, the Covenanting military defeats had weakened the perceptions of Covenanting military strength on the part of the English parliamentarians. Furthermore, the

rise of the New Model Army as an effective military unit of the parliamentarian cause had proved crucial to the defeat of Charles I in the First Civil War in England in 1646. The rise of 'Independency' as a religious sect also weakened the potential for a presbyterian church settlement in England.

Independents believed there should be no state church in England; they were politically hostile to English presbyterians in contact with the



■ Cromwell: attacked Hamilton's force.

## TIMELINE



■ **The Covenanters** – by William Harris Weatherhead – illustrates the tension between opposing philosophies.

Covenanters; and they had strong support in the parliamentarian army.

By 1646 the Anglo-Scottish parliamentary alliance was under strain and the key focus of attention now moved to the position of Charles I, who handed himself over to the Scots army in England not only as a way of causing division among the Covenanters and the English Parliament, but also in an attempt to secure the best political position for himself.

The King's refusal to budge on the issue of agreeing to the Covenanters' demands for the imposition of presbyterianism in England meant that he was now a political liability for the Covenanters and the English Parliament was now claiming that it had sole jurisdiction to decide on Charles I's fate as King of England (despite the fact that he was also King of Scotland).

The political deal eventually reached led to future accusations that the Covenanters had 'sold' the King to the English Parliament, for the Covenanters agreed to withdraw their armed forces in England in return for arrears of pay. On payment of £400,000 sterling (£4.8 million Scots), the King was handed over to the official jurisdiction of the English Parliament which would decide his fate.

The perceived sale of the King led to a political revival of conservative Covenanters and Royalists in Scotland, and in December, 1647, the secret Engagement Treaty was agreed with the King.

The Scots agreed to provide military aid to restore the King in England and the King agreed to

introduce presbyterianism in England for a trial period of three years.

The other political terms of the treaty were 'federalist' in tone and sought to redefine the Anglo-Scottish union on more equal terms – in which Scots would be accorded an equal political role and status.

The change in political climate in Scotland was reflected in the nature of the 1648 Engagement Parliament, under the direction of James, third Marquis and first Duke of Hamilton.

The radical political wing of Covenanters which had dominated the 1640s was now in a minority, although it was vehemently opposed to the Engagement, as was the Commission of the Kirk of the

Church of Scotland. Preparations for an invasion of England to restore the King took place throughout May and June, 1648, and the Engagement army, consisting of 14,000-15,000 troops and commanded by the Duke of Hamilton, crossed into England in early July, 1648.

The Scottish invasion had been planned to meet with Royalist uprisings in England and Wales, but these had failed to be effective and, after the defeat of the Welsh rising at Pembroke on July 11, Cromwell was free to turn his attention on the Scottish invasion force.

By mid-August Hamilton's force was in Lancashire, where it was attacked from behind by Cromwell at Preston on August 17. The military defeat of the Engager army at Preston not only shattered the Royalist cause but also unleashed powerful political social and political forces in Scotland.

The Whiggamore Raid of September, 1648 – essentially an armed attack and coup from southwest Scotland on Edinburgh – proceeded to set up a political regime in Edinburgh hostile to the Engagers and anti-aristocratic in its political outlook. This regime also had a powerful social vision of implementing a purified godly society in Scotland.

Under intense theological pressure from the Commission of the Kirk of the Church of Scotland and enjoying the initial backing of Oliver Cromwell, this regime proceeded to pursue a social and religious agenda aimed at producing Christ's kingdom on earth. ■



■ The Graham family's coat of arms.

### 1642

Alasdair MacColla develops 'Highland Charge', a highly effective military tactic.

### 1644

After the defeat at Marston Moor, Royalists are boosted by arrival of 1,600 Irish troops in West Highlands.

### 1644-5

Royalist alliance led by Marquis of Montrose and MacColla inflicts six crushing defeats on the Covenanters.

### 1645

February: 1,500 Campbells slaughtered by Montrose-MacColla army at Inverlochy.

### 1645

September: Covenanting force of 6,000 annihilates Royalist army, ending Montrose-MacColla run of success.

### 1646

Credibility weakened by Royalist successes, the Covenanters agree to the English parliament deciding Charles I's fate.

### 1647

The Engagement: Charles I secures support of Royalists and conservative Covenanters.

### 1648

July: Engagement army of 15,000 invades England to attempt restoration of Charles.

### 1648

August: Cromwell's New Model Army defeats Engager army, shattering Royalist cause.

### 1648

September: Cromwell-backed Presbyterian coup sets up anti-aristocratic regime in Edinburgh.

A portrait painting of James Graham, Marquis of Montrose. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark blue velvet jacket over a white cravat and a white ruffled collar. His hair is powdered and powdered white. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to his left.

# Military genius who had a historic change of heart

■ James Graham, Marquis of Montrose: Although he was one of the principal signatories of the National Covenant, he began to disagree strongly with the Kirk's anti-monarchist line.



■ Marking simpler achievements of a brilliant battlefield tactician – medals awarded to the Marquis of Montrose for outstanding proficiency in archery.

## Montrose lived the life of a romantic hero, but did he try too hard?

*He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his Deserts are small,  
That puts it not unto the Touch,  
To win or lose it all*

It is doubtful whether James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, did in fact write these famous lines to his mistress, as many have thought. But if they were penned by him, they surely stand as testimony to his extraordinary qualities of leadership. His military prowess inspired Sir John Fortescue, official historian of the British Army, to describe him as "perhaps the most brilliant natural military genius disclosed by the Civil War".

As it happens, Montrose was a poet, too – but not a very good one.

A similarly negative verdict might be made of his political skills, which were outshone by his abilities on the battlefield – and fell far short of those of his great rival, Archibald the eighth Earl of Argyll. Indeed, even if

Montrose were the author of the above verse, it has struck some critics as the utterance of a stonewalling general rather than that of an accomplished politician.

Born in 1612, Montrose was educated at the University of St Andrews. As a young man, he travelled to Italy, France and the Low Countries, before returning to Scotland in 1637, when the fracas over King Charles I's church policies was in full flight.

Described by contemporaries as 'a young man in a hurry', he tried a bit too hard – it has often been remarked – to live the life of the romantic hero.

Montrose's desire to cultivate such an image is clearly reflected in the main phase of his career, but on the other hand, his life during that time was undeniably full of drama.

He was one of the handful of nobles who drew up the National Covenant of 1638, and was one of its principle signatories.

From having a reasonably

undistinguished military career at the outset of the civil wars, he lead an army of Covenanters across the Brig of Dee, and took Aberdeen. Greater military success was to come later, after he experienced a dramatic change of heart over the 'War of the Covenant'.

As events progressed, he made clear that he strongly disagreed with the increasingly anti-monarchist line of the Kirk. He then spectacularly switched his loyalties from the Covenanters to a defence of king Charles I.

When Montrose teamed up with the Gaelic general Alasdair MacColla, the scene was set for a stunning string of military victories between 1644-5. The personalities of the two generals engendered a relationship that had much greater effectiveness on the battlefield than either man could muster individually. MacColla and Montrose worked well together, but not apart.

It has been said that in some ways

their relationship was akin to that of the later Prince Charles Edward Stewart and his leading general, Lord George Murray.

When the news of Charles I's execution reached Montrose in 1649, he swore to avenge his king, but lost most of the small army he managed to assemble by shipwreck in the passage from Orkney to Caithness.

His dispirited regiment was cut to pieces at Invercarron in Ross-shire on April 27, 1650.

Montrose then lived the life of a fugitive, and almost starved to death in the wilds of Sutherland, before eventually being delivered into the hands of the Covenanter general David Leslie.

Montrose was hanged in the High Street in Edinburgh on May 21, 1650. Eleven years later, his mangled and rotten remains were collected and buried at St Giles Cathedral, where a stately monument was eventually erected to him in 1888. ■

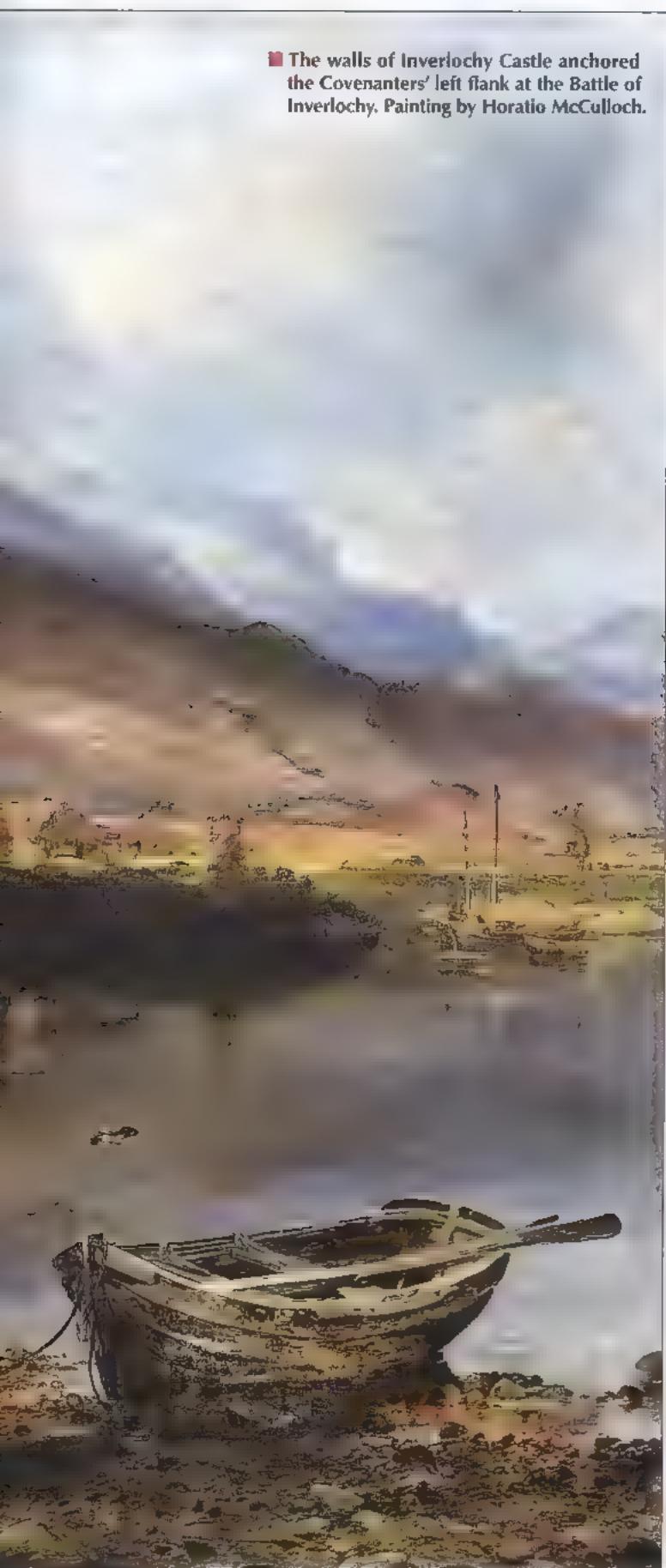
MONTROSE

# FUELLED BY FROZEN



# OATMEAL AND FAME

■ The walls of Inverlochy Castle anchored the Covenanters' left flank at the Battle of Inverlochy. Painting by Horatio McCulloch.



In the biggest gamble of Montrose's remarkable military career, he took the long way round to shock Argyll in a triumphant rout at Inverlochy

The author John Buchan wrote that Montrose's victory at Inverlochy was "one of the great exploits in the history of British arms"

His march, in the depths of winter through mountain passes, to catch by surprise a force that outnumbered him by more than three to one, reveals him not only as a tactician of genius but as a general endowed with the irreplaceable gifts of boldness and self-confidence.

In the civil wars of the 17th century, which began in England and drew in Scotland as well, Montrose had been one of those who originally opposed King Charles I and his imposition of new forms of religious service in Scotland.

But he had no sympathy for the grim fundamentalism of the Kirk, and, after meeting the King himself at Berwick-on-Tweed, he found himself drawn to the royal cause.

It cost him five months' imprisonment in Edinburgh Castle, then exile to England, but in 1644 he was back in Scotland, returning in disguise, to meet up with 1,200 Irish and Highland soldiers under the legendary Alasdair MacColla, the man who had virtually invented the Highland Charge as a military tactic, and who became his second in-command.

Between them, they were to mount the most successful campaign that Scotland had seen since the days

of Robert the Bruce. Their early victories, at Tippermuir, near Perth, and at Aberdeen, brought them into confrontation with Archibald, 8th Earl of Argyll, and Chief of Clan Campbell.

Montrose's clan army, composed as it was of men native to the western Highlands, as well as MacColla's Irish warriors, were natural enemies of the Campbells, which lent the later clashes an extra dimension of rivalry. It was one that Montrose was only too willing to exploit.

That autumn he swung westwards, and took Argyll by surprise in his own stronghold of Inveraray, which he burned to the ground. Argyll himself was forced to sail across Loch Fyne to safety.

Now, however, Montrose faced a potential trap. Furious at his humiliation, Argyll summoned one of his best generals, Duncan Campbell of Auchinbreck, from Ireland to head an army of 5,000 men, backed by ships, which blocked all exits to the West. Meanwhile in Edinburgh, General William Baillie set out with 3,000 seasoned troops, some of them brought north from England, to seal off the only other means of escape, through the Tay Valley, back to the North East.

In mid-winter, with their food running out, increasingly deserted by those clansmen who had taken their booty home with them, the Highlanders and Irish numbered ▶



■ Lions in winter: Inspired by his leadership and the promise of fame, Montrose's men struggled through such terrain – Glen Lochy backed by Ben Lui.

► fewer than 1,500 men. But instead of taking their chances and fleeing back towards Atholl country, Montrose took his men the other way, into the bleak wilds of Lochaber.

He left Inveraray in January, 1645, heading north through the Pass of Brander, to Loch Etive, where they found two boats, one large and one small, to ferry his tired soldiers across the loch, near Dunstaffnage Castle.

They made the crossing in bright cold sunlight and a full moon, without being spotted by the enemy. Then Montrose headed to Loch Leven, through the narrow pass of Glen Coe, found boats to cross over and again escaped the notice of Argyll's troops.

Pressing on up the banks of Loch Lochy, he reached Kilcummin – now Fort Augustus – at the head of Loch Ness, and there he halted.

He was, though he cannot have known it immediately, almost mid-way between two armies which together totalled 8,000 men.

Both Argyll and Baillie, with the support now of Seaforth, Chief of the MacKenzies, were convinced that they had Montrose trapped. Sooner or later, he would have to emerge into the Great Glen, the only escape route to the North east, and as soon as he did that, he would find himself facing three separate forces. Argyll, with his ships sealing the southern end at Inverlochy, close to the modern town of Fort William; Baillie's army holding the mountain passes to the east; and Seaforth marching down the Great Glen itself from Inverness.

As if this were not enough, the weather, which had been cold but clear until then, began to close in. There was heavy rain on the low ground, and drifting snow higher up in the hills.

Montrose now took the greatest gamble of his military career. He told his men that, instead of marching on towards Inverness to meet Seaforth's poorly-trained force, they would attempt the impossible and head out of the Glen up into the forbidding Monadhliath mountains, skirting Ben Nevis itself, before trying to find a way through the snow-blocked passes to descend on Inverlochy and take Argyll by surprise.

Early on the morning of Friday, January 31, they headed into the hills, following the course of the Tarff river, their tracks obliterated by a blizzard. Any military strategist of today, studying the ground and the conditions, would have called Montrose's decision mad.

The paths were lost in the drifts, the ice-bound ravines impassable. A whole army could be ambushed by a

dozen men if they were found. The Highlanders had little food save for oatmeal, which they mixed with snow to eat. They moved with desperate slowness through the snow.

It is here that Montrose's gifts of leadership showed. He showed his men the conditions could be met and survived. He told them they were drawn together by a bond by which they "would be reputed famous men".

The exact route he chose remains a matter of dispute. Highland tradition says they descended on Inverlochy by way of Glen Nevis, marching to the head of Loch Treig, and so into the Glen. But this is a long and mountainous way. Montrose had

Cameron and Macdonald guides who knew the hills well enough to take him the shorter way, up the Tarff burn, crossing above Cullachy, parallel to the stretch where the Caledonian Canal now runs, until the Calder burn; ascending the burn and turning south up the Alt nan Larach to the headwaters of the Turriff; thence south-west into Glen Roy.

On the way they met a party of Argyll scouts and killed them. That was their only encounter with the enemy until, as darkness gathered, they found themselves at the base of Meall-an-t-suidhe, the hill of the seat, from where they could look down on the castle at Inverlochy on

the southern side of the River Lochy. They could see the camp-fires of the soldiers and out on Loch Eil, a ship at anchor. They could not have known, however, that Argyll himself was on the ship, confident that he had Montrose bottled up in the trap he had prepared for him.

All that night, Montrose's army waited in the cold, finishing the last of their frozen oatmeal, unable to light a fire for fear of giving away their position.

At dawn on Candlemas, February 2, Montrose drew up his men on the steep slope above Inverlochy, with the Lochaber clans in the centre, commanded by himself, and the Irish

■ Despite his spectacular victories, Montrose's luck ran out, and the failure of his final campaign led to his execution by the Covenanters – after the humiliation of being led through the streets of Edinburgh. Painting by James Drummond.



on the wings. MacColla led the right, and Magnus O'Cahan, an Ulsterman the left. Behind them was a little troop of horses under Sir Thomas Ogilvy. Then, as the Highlanders drew their plaids around them, Montrose sounded the battle trumpet which he used to signal an attack.

Then came the fearsome Cameron pibroch 'Sons of dogs, come and I will give you flesh'

Down below, the startled Campbells heard the sound and knew suddenly that Montrose was not where they thought he was.

Auchinbreck by now had 4,000 men with him, and he ordered them

into a solid square, eight ranks deep with Clan Campbell in the centre and some of Baillie's Lowland troops on each wing. Down the slope came Montrose's army, muskets in hand, uttering their battle-cry.

The Highland Charge has been described as "the most terrible sight a man can see", and here it had the added menace of total surprise.

The two wings hit the waiting troops first. Muskets exploded, then were thrown away as the battle came, in Montrose's words, "to push of pike and dint of sword".

Auchinbreck tried to steady his men, but the first line had been driven back on the second, and panic had set

in. The Lowlanders were the first to break and flee, leaving the Campbells to take the onslaught in the centre without support.

For a time they stood - "stout and gallant men," as one description put it, "worthy of a better chief and a juster cause." But then they broke, and the slaughter began.

More than 1,500, including Auchinbreck and 40 chieftains, fell to the swords of their enemy - it was a disaster for the clan which took a generation to make up.

On Montrose's side, fewer than a dozen men were lost.

Out in the bay, Argyll watched with horror, then, as defeat loomed,

he upped anchor and - for the second time that winter - fled from the scene of battle.

That night, Montrose sat down in Inverlochy Castle and wrote his report for the King:

"Through God's blessing I am in the fairest hopes of reducing this kingdom to your Majesty's obedience," he said, "... I doubt not before the end of this summer, I shall be able to come to your Majesty's assistance with a brave army which, backed with the justice of your Majesty's cause, will make the rebels in England as well as Scotland feel the just rewards of rebellion."



# The warrior's power behind the Marquis

When a friendless Montrose and a fearsome Alasdair MacColla joined forces, it was the start of a potent battle-winning partnership – with different motives



■ The peaceful shore of Colonsay – birthplace of the powerful MacColla fighting family. Alasdair's father, also a famous warrior, was captured by the Earl of Argyll.

**T**he name Alasdair MacColla is legendary in the history of Highland warfare. He inspired fear among his enemies and devotion among his followers. From 1644 to 1646 he was the Marquis of Montrose's right-hand man, and, some say, the inspiration for his greatest victories.

He is said to have invented the Highland Charge and made it the most formidable military tactic of the age. He was the hero of the Celtic clans, and the scourge of Campbell power in the western Highlands.

Far less is known of him, however, than the great Montrose himself. Even his name is disputed. To some, he was the military commander General Sir Alexander MacDonald; to others, he was known as Colkitto, from his nickname, meaning left-handed or crafty and cunning. But most knew him as Alasdair MacColla, a mighty swordsman from the island

of Colonsay where his father, a famous warrior, had set up home and from where he waged ceaseless war against the forces of government.

Although the Statutes of Iona in 1609 were meant to formalise peace in the west, among the Macdonald clans in Scotland and Northern Ireland, rebellion continued – mainly directed against their arch-rivals, the Campbells. When Alasdair's father was captured and held prisoner by the Earl of Argyll, Chief of Clan Campbell, rebellion turned into all-out war.

Mac Colla, born probably on Colonsay in about 1605, learned his fighting in Northern Ireland, and for a time commanded a company raised to combat a Catholic rebellion in 1641. But he changed sides and joined the Irish rebels, winning an unexpected victory over a British regiment at Portnaw in January 1642. An army, led by Argyll, was sent to Antrim to combat the rebels,

but before it could arrive MacColla and his allies met a force of around 700 men and defeated them at the Battle of Laney There, for the first recorded time, the Highland Charge was used – a ferocious assault, in which small groups of running soldiers threw aside their muskets and launched an attack at speed to the sound of fearsome war-cries. Its success owed as much to sheer intimidation as to force of arms.

Buoyed by his success, MacColla conducted a series of guerrilla raids in the Western Isles, with mixed fortunes. Then, in November 1644, he set out for the mainland with a force of some 800 Irish fighters, reaching Blair Castle in Perthshire some weeks later after a campaign of plundering across the Highlands.

It was here that he met up with Montrose, to form an alliance that would, over the next year, bring the royalist cause of Charles I to the

**MacColla is said to have killed more than twenty men, and got through three swords, hacking off the pikes imbedded in his shield with a single stroke**



Eyes of anger: the Highland soldiers' wild spirit that made their battle charges so ferocious – and so feared – is captured in this painting by Joseph Paton.

brink of total victory in Scotland

For Montrose, at this stage almost friendless, MacColla brought a battle-hardened army. For MacColla, Montrose supplied the legitimacy of the king's commission. Their twin causes anti-Covenant for Montrose, anti-Campbell for MacColla – came together as one.

According to a royalist pamphlet, their supporters "shouted and call'd out with one voice, they would have no more of King Campbells Government; they would either loose their lives, or have King Stuart to his owne place again".

Over the next few months they were to win a series of stunning victories. At Tippermuir, near Perth, they met and defeated a far larger army of Covenanters, with MacColla's Irish troops firing off just one musket round, then charging the enemy with sword and dirk. They must have been a

terrifying sight, for the other side's infantry turned and fled at once.

Perth was captured soon after, the burgh surrendering because "the hounds of hell were drawn up before our ports newly bathed in blood".

Two weeks later Aberdeen fell too, with the Irish exacting a terrible revenge in slaughter and plunder within the city. Next MacColla struck west into Argyll, driving all before him and winning himself a reputation as "the destroyer of houses".

Sooner or later, however, he and Montrose would have to meet in Argyll's army, and this they did at the Battle of Inverlochy, where a flanking march through the hills above Glen Nevis took the Campbell troops by surprise and forced Argyll himself to flee by sea.

It was, however, at the Battle of Auldearn, near Inverness, that MacColla's prowess as a warrior

reached its zenith. For one thing, this was no instant rout – the battle lasted 12 hours against a well-trained and determined force. MacColla himself is said to have killed more than 20 men, and got through three swords, hacking off the pikes embedded in his target or shield, with a single stroke.

Although most historians have credited the victory to Montrose, recent research by David Steer suggests that it was MacColla who turned defeat into victory by moving his forces to the rear, then launching a surprise attack from behind, taking an enemy army that otherwise might have overwhelmed the royalists.

MacColla and Montrose were men with different missions, and most notably the time came when they broke apart. MacColla preferred to ravage Campbell territory in Argyll. Montrose wanted to establish a government in Scotland on behalf of his King. But

he could never raise the support he needed in the Lowlands, and instead at the hands of General Leslie at Philiphaugh, began his campaign to an end.

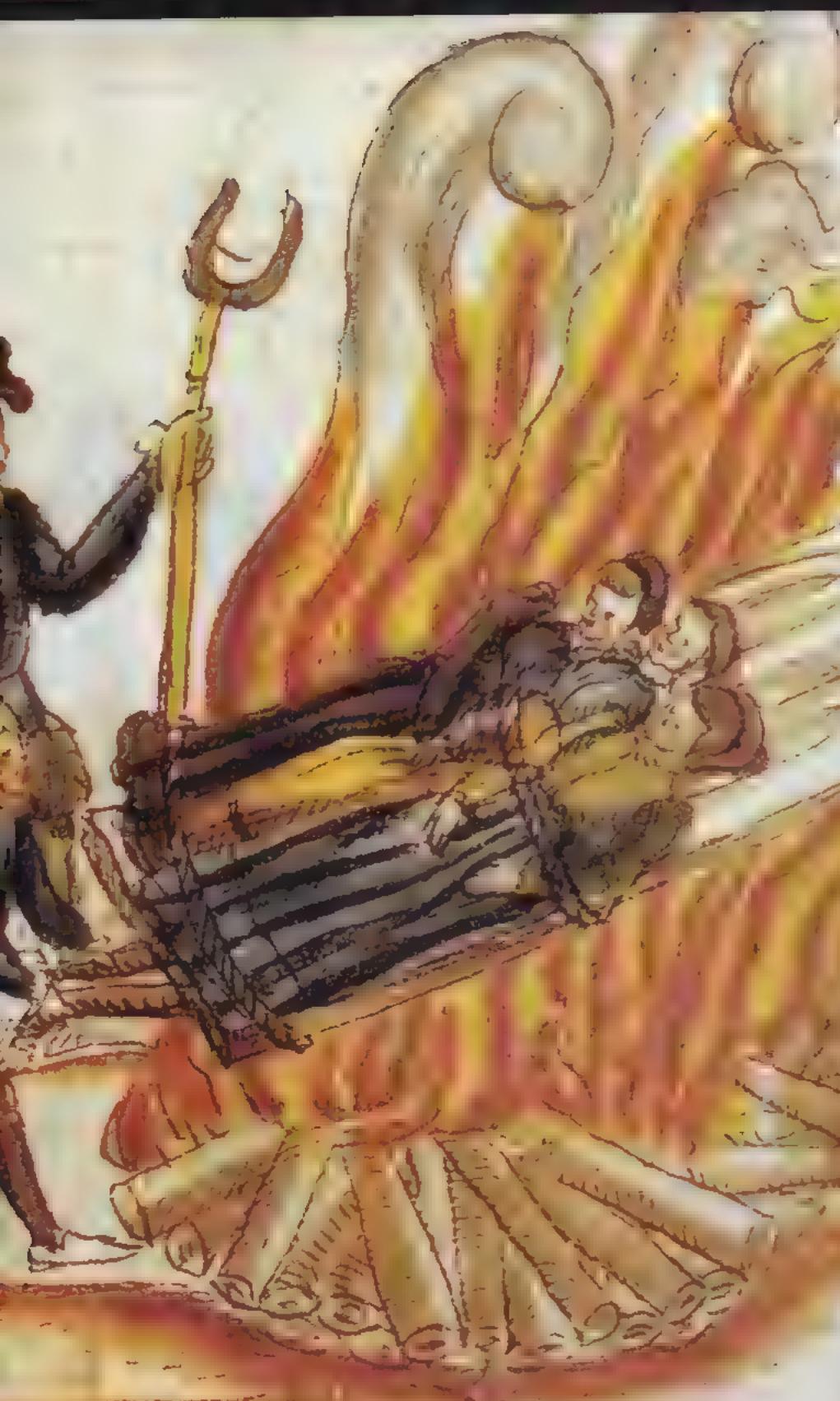
When Charles I was defeated in England, Montrose disbanded his army and went abroad. MacColla kept fighting in the West, but was beaten by Leslie and forced to retreat to Ireland, where he was killed on November 13, 1647, at Knocknanuss.

His courage in battle and his ability to turn desperate situations into potential victories mark him out as a famous warrior. He was not, however, a tactician like Montrose. As one contemporary historian put it, he was "as stout and strong a man as ever carried a broad sword and targett of late days, and so vigorous in fight, that had his conduct been equivalent to his valour, he had been one of the best Generals in Europe".

# A Devil of a panic over



# witches who weren't



The burning of witches began in Europe the 15th century – this depiction is from Switzerland, then centre of the madness – and spread to Scotland around 1550, to be promoted later by King James VI.

When Scotland joined the great European witch-hunt, with 'accomplices' being named by suspects under torture, about 1,500 were executed

**W**itch-hunting took place in Scotland between about 1550 and 1700, during the general European witch-hunt of that period. But people had believed in witches long before then. Magic and the supernatural were part of everyday peasant life; some people were thought to have had supernatural powers for good or ill. Those thought to cast malicious spells on their neighbours were shunned or had counter-magic employed against their sorcery.

Witchcraft occasionally became criminal when high politics was involved. The earliest known executions of Scottish witches took place in 1479 when John, Earl of Mar, was accused of employing their sorcery against his brother, King James III. This was an isolated incident, and the witches' crime could be seen as treason rather than witchcraft as such.

The peasants did not ask where witches' powers came from. But around this time, Continental theologians were pondering the links between village sorcery and Christian heresy – and this was the first question they asked. They concluded that witches' powers came from the Devil. This led to the spread of elaborate demonological scholarship. King James VI made a notable Scottish contribution to it with his book Daemonologie (1597).

This new intellectual model saw village witchcraft as heretical and diabolical, rather than (as earlier Medieval scholars had believed) as superstitious and ignorant. Witches were now seen as an underground sect of Devil-worshippers, the mirror-image of Christians – worshipping God. They sold their souls to the Devil in a rite known as the demonic pact – the equivalent of baptism. They worshipped him in witches' sabbaths – the equivalent of church services. The

## Some kirk sessions employed 'witch prickers' – experts who could find the Devil's mark on a spot that did not bleed when pricked

16th-century demonologists elaborated these ideas with material from witches' confessions and circulated them throughout Europe. Fears of witchcraft grew, as it became a statutory crime in Scotland in 1563.

So while peasants thought only of individual witches who harmed their neighbours, the elite thought of a conspiracy against God and society. It was those who feared this conspiracy who organised witch-hunts.

Scottish witch-hunters were mainly local lairds and kirk sessions – leaders of local society, and local representatives of the godly state. Most witch-hunting was in core areas of the state, like Fife and Lothian; there was hardly any in the Highlands, where there were few state institutions.

We need to be clear that the witch-conspiracy feared by the elite did not really exist. There were certainly individuals who really did things that looked like witchcraft. Some people really did cast spells. Patrick Lawrie in Ayrshire in 1605 cured a sick child by rituals that involved covering her face and making the sign of the cross. Other people cursed their neighbours during quarrels. In 1605, for instance, Isobel Grierson in Prestongrange said to Margaret Donaldson: "The faggot of Hell light on thee, and Hell's cauldron may thou seethe in."

Such a curse could inspire real fear, and Donaldson was ill for nine weeks afterwards. But Lawrie and Grierson were isolated individuals. There was no organisation of witches, no underground witch-religion.

Some historians used to argue that witchcraft was an underground pagan cult surviving from pre-Christian times. No scholars accept this any more, but it has become a modern folk belief. Nowadays there really is a pagan witch-religion; pagan witches sometimes appear on television to explain how they were misunderstood and persecuted in earlier times. But today's pagan witches began no earlier than the 20th century, as many of them recognise.

At the time of the witch-hunts, everyone was a Christian. They might still have

believed in fairies and other odd things that might not seem Christian to us, but that just shows we now have a different idea of Christianity. The witch-hunters themselves recognised that witches were Christians and not pagans; the Devil, after all, is a Christian concept.

If there were no real witch conspiracy, where did the witch-hunters get their idea of one? Basically, they did it by torture. During the mass witchcraft panics suspected witches were interrogated and asked to name their accomplices – people who had attended the witches' sabbath with them.

Physical tortures, like thumbscrews, were surprisingly rare. Sleep deprivation was much more common – and more effective. After about three days without sleep, not only do you lose the ability to resist your questioners, but you also start to hallucinate. No wonder so many confessions included exotic detail like animal transformations, flying on straw or sailing on the sea in sieves.

These are not the factual accounts of a real, organised group; they are fantasies concocted by confused, despairing and terrified people, searching desperately for the answers that would satisfy their interrogators.

Tragically, all these confessions simply confirmed the interrogators' belief that the Devil and his agents really were loose in the world. The more witches confessed in detail to flying out to attend the sabbath, the more the witch-hunters were encouraged to rid the land of such horrors. Innocent people could not possibly confess to such things, or even know about them. Guilty ones were unlikely to confess unless pressure was brought to bear.

There was not going to be any other evidence, apart from the confessions, since witches carried out their diabolical activities in secret. So the courts accepted the confessions willingly.

We may well regard the great witch-hunt as a shocking miscarriage of justice. If so, perhaps we will reflect that there have been miscarriages of justice in modern times too.

This comparison is worth pursuing further. Modern miscarriages of justice have usually occurred after shocking crimes. There is a public outcry demanding that the offenders be punished. And the suspects in the dock have confessed. In the heat of the moment, who wants to ask awkward questions about how their confessions were obtained?

Well, in the 17th century, witchcraft was a shocking crime, quite as threatening to the status quo as terrorism is today. The Devil would overthrow the social order if he could. In the heat of the moment, the



King James presides personally over brutal examination of women said to be witches.

courts accepted doubtful evidence about witchcraft because they panicked.

We can pinpoint when the worst panic occurred. More than half of all Scottish witch-hunting took place in brief periods of national panic: 1590-1, 1597, 1628-30, 1649, and 1661-2. Other years saw a trickle of individual cases, but the panics produced a flood. In such periods, 82 per cent of the cases where the outcome is known ended with executions; in non-panic periods, it was only 50 per cent.

The supply of witches was readily increased by asking the initial suspect (those denounced by their neighbours) to name their accomplices. When the authorities were most frightened by witchcraft, they were most willing to see it as a conspiracy. About half of all Scottish witches had a neighbourhood reputation for witchcraft before their arrest. The remainder seem to have been blameless until they were named by a 'witch' under interrogation, and then hauled in and interrogated until they turn confessed.

Altogether there were about 1,500 executions for witchcraft, plus another two thousand or so formal accusations which did not end in execution. This was fairly typical for Europe as a whole, where there were between 50,000 and 100,000 executions.

The witches themselves were mostly women (85 per cent). Most were older, while some younger women were accused because their mothers were witches.

Male witches were mostly husbands of witches, or were folk healers. Folk healers as such were not targeted (it is untrue that witch-hunting was prompted by a jealous medical profession), but might be denounced if they were

## Newes from Scotland.

that hee did woorke it by the Devil, without whom it could never haue bene so sufficientlie effected: and therpon, the name of the said Doctor Fien (who was but a very yong man) began to grow so common among the people of Scotland, that he was secretiely nominated for a notable Cunivter.



■ 'Newes from Scotland' told the sensational story of 'warlock' John Cunningham. He was among the 100 or so witches who at Berwick, plotted the destruction of James VI.

brought to have missed their power. Witches were mostly settled members of their communities, not vagrants or beggars. It took years to build up a reputation for witchcraft among one's neighbours. A few poorer women even sought respect by encouraging this process, cursing anyone who crossed them. Malevolent curses, followed by misfortune to the victim, provided regular confirmation of peasant-witch-beliefs. It was neighbourhood quarrels that initially prompted and validated witch-hunting.

But the agents of authority actually carried out witch-hunts. The most important such agents were kirk sessions, the parish committees of the Protestant church. Their members – the 'elders' – were mostly local lairds, junior members of the ruling elite. Kirk sessions aimed to enforce godly discipline over all the parishioners, particularly in sexual matters. They punished adulterers and

fornicators in large numbers. Women witches were very often accused of having sex with the Devil, and their crime seems almost to have been seen as demonic fornication.

Kirk sessions were not criminal courts, and so could not conduct witchcraft trials, but they could arrest and interrogate suspects, obtain confessions, and compile dossiers to be used in court. As well as obtaining confessions and taking depositions from aggrieved neighbours, some kirk sessions employed 'witch-prickers' – experts who could find the Devil's mark. The mark was an insensitive spot that did not bleed when pricked.

In the late 17th century, witch-hunting declined all over Europe. Belief in it largely continued, but it ceased to be central to the belief-system of the élite. Godly discipline declined as the state began to accept religious pluralism. Adopting a new nationalist empiricism,

authorities hesitated to accept evidence of witchcraft. Witch-pricking largely ceased after 1662, when some prickers were exposed as frauds; this removed an important source of evidence.

Sceptical lawyers carefully agreed (at least publicly) that witchcraft could exist in theory; they simply could not accept the evidence for it in particular cases. Traditional witch-hunters found this frustratingly hard to argue against.

Sir George Mackenzie, Lord Advocate between 1677 and 1686, was particularly sceptical and did his best to ensure that witchcraft prosecutions ended in acquittal. A string of acquittals meant that there was less point in bringing prosecutions. There were no mass panics after 1662, and hardly any cases at all after 1700. The last execution was in 1727. The 1563 witchcraft statute was repealed in 1736, and witch-hunting faded quietly away.

# The world according to Wandering William



■ VISITED: Malaga – where he was arrested and tortured as a spy.



■ VISITED: Venice – reached via Naples, Loretto, Ancona and damsels in distress.

**Long before the plane made the globe shrink, poet William Lithgow became Scotland's most internationally travelled son**

Poet and pedestrian extraordinaire William Lithgow (1585-1645), was one of Scotland's magnificent originals. The son of a Lanark burgess, he claimed kinship with the Graham earls of Montrose through his mother. Following a youthful scandal involving a local girl, he embarked on a series of exotic wanderings during which he claimed to have travelled some 36,000 miles – a feat for which another poet called him 'William the Wandering'.

At Jerusalem he had a device tattooed on his right arm with on one side the lettering 'The never conquered Crowne of Scotland' and on the other 'The now unconquerable Crowne of England' – revealing himself to be a true post-Union chauvinist.

His first excursion was to Orkney and Shetland. Shortly later, he visited Germany, Bohemia, Switzerland and the Low Countries. After a residence

in Paris he walked to Rome, a city which he quit in haste to avoid the clutches of the Inquisition. His itinerary took him to Naples, Loretto, Ancona and Venice.

The published accounts of his adventures were greeted in some quarters with considerable scepticism and although he denied his critics' accusations of being a 'fictitious personage', he nevertheless admitted to being at the hands of bandits and muggings, who had the opportunity to help prisoners escape and rescue the odd damsel in distress. He fed a new, early 17th-century vogue for adventurous travelogues and often encountered fellow-Scots in remote, exotic locations.

From Venice he headed for Greece and the Near East after sojourning in

the islands of the Mediterranean. Two Venetians in Greece supplied him with funds to continue what he described as his 'narrative peregrination'. This was that unlikely episode he sold the possessions of three travelling companions, who accompanied him from Jerusalem to Cyprus where they died from drinking strong, unwatered Cyprus wine.

From Alexandria, he sailed to Malta and Sicily, crossing to the mainland for a further trip to Paris, before making for London where he received an audience with James VI.

After a year he was off again to southern Italy where, he informed his incredulous readers, he came upon the bodies of two young dandies who had just despatched one another in a duel. Their rings and purses funded his trip to North Africa where he enjoyed the sights of Barbary, Morocco, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, before sailing back to Italy.



## The Total Discourse, Of the Rare Adventures, and painfull Peregrinations of long nineteen Years Tra wyles, from SCOTLAND, to the most Famous Kingdomes in Europe, ASIA, and AFRIA.

Lithgow's book of 'Rare Adventures' that intrigued James Graham.

whence he wandered through Hungary, Germany and Poland, taking a ship from Danzig to London

In 1619 he set out once more armed with letters of recommendation from the King. From Ireland, he sailed to France and then struck out for Portugal and Spain; but at Malaga he was arrested as a spy and suffered brutal torture before being handed over to the Inquisition which inflicted further painful mutilation from which he never fully recovered

Back in London, he displayed his injuries. King James sent him to recuperate at Bath for 27 weeks at royal expense

An attempt to secure some compensation from the Spanish ambassador led to Lithgow visiting violence upon his person for which ill-considered, if satisfying, act of hostility he received a nine week jail sentence. He continued to petition the English parliament for some sort

of redress, without success.

The year 1629 found him back in Scotland en route to the Hebrides. He stopped off to visit James Graham, future Marquis of Montrose – then a student at St Andrews who paid him the considerable sum of £5:16s for a copy of his book of 'Rare Adventures' from Scotland to 'the Most Famous Kingdoms in Europe, Asia and Africa'

That same year, Lithgow composed his remarkable poem 'Scotland's Welcome to Her Native Sonne, and Soveraigne Lord King Charles'.

By now he had truly been consigned to the wilderness, culturally and financially, and he desperately sought aristocratic or royal patronage

The poem was intended as a eulogy and petition to Charles I on the occasion of his Scottish coronation which, because of the King's personal unpopularity, was delayed until 1633, a lengthy eight years after his actual

**When he had been properly consigned to the wilderness, culturally and financially, Lithgow desperately sought aristocratic or royal patronage**

succession. In the poem, which deserves to be much better known, Scotland addresses Charles as Mother, Wife and Daughter. His effusion beautifully captures the current mood of disenchantment with the King and so indicates popular attitudes engendered, not so much by the great debates about religion and the constitution, but rather by the discomforts and disappointments of everyday life in the lead-up to the Covenanter Revolution.

It begins on a joyful note as Scotland welcomes Charles's return. Nature rejoices, rivers bellow their greetings, mountains exult. Edinburgh has prepared spectacular pageants and 'rarest dainties'. But once the envisaged coronation is over, the (substantial) list of complaints begins...

Justice is lacking, religion under threat, parliament ignored, trade in jeopardy. The nobility squander their wealth in London, at court, at the expense of their long-suffering tenants who experience oppression, rent rises and unstable markets.

The great ones favour the English language so that they 'forgetting Scots, can speak with gilded spurs'. There is no money for hospitals, schools and bridges.

Swearing is universal. Witch burnings have created a coal shortage. Scottish youths have been corrupted through card-playing, lust and drunkenness. There is a

deplorable fashion for long hair; men are...

*growne effeminate, weare Womens locks,  
Freize-hanging combed o'er shoulders,  
necks and cloaks*

*That many doubt if they be Maids or  
Men,  
Till that their beards sprout forth, and  
then they ken*

Many of Lithgow's criticisms can be corroborated from contemporary sources and demonstrate the truism that it is the petty inconveniences of life which drive people to revolution.

Little is known of Lithgow thereafter, though to judge from his poem of 1640, 'The Gushing Teares of Godly Sorrow', the optimism and courage which sustained his earlier peregrinations had given way, in later life, to near-despair. However 'Godly Tears' did contain some memorable lines such as:

*Why should strangers  
Enjoy profit from fantastic Rangers?  
Or the despondent  
The more we strive to know, the less we ken  
And who could resist the following?*

*How precious were these tears of  
Magdalen, who washed Christ's feet,  
with eye-repenting drops?  
Yea with her hair, did dry these feet  
again, And kissed them, with her  
lip-bepearled chops.*

A true eccentric, Wilham Lithgow was one of the most far travelled poets who ever lived and, arguably, Scotland's first Citizen of the World.



VISITED: Shetland – where he first ventured from his birthplace of Lanark.

# For whom the Pope was doom

*There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head therof, but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.* Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, vi

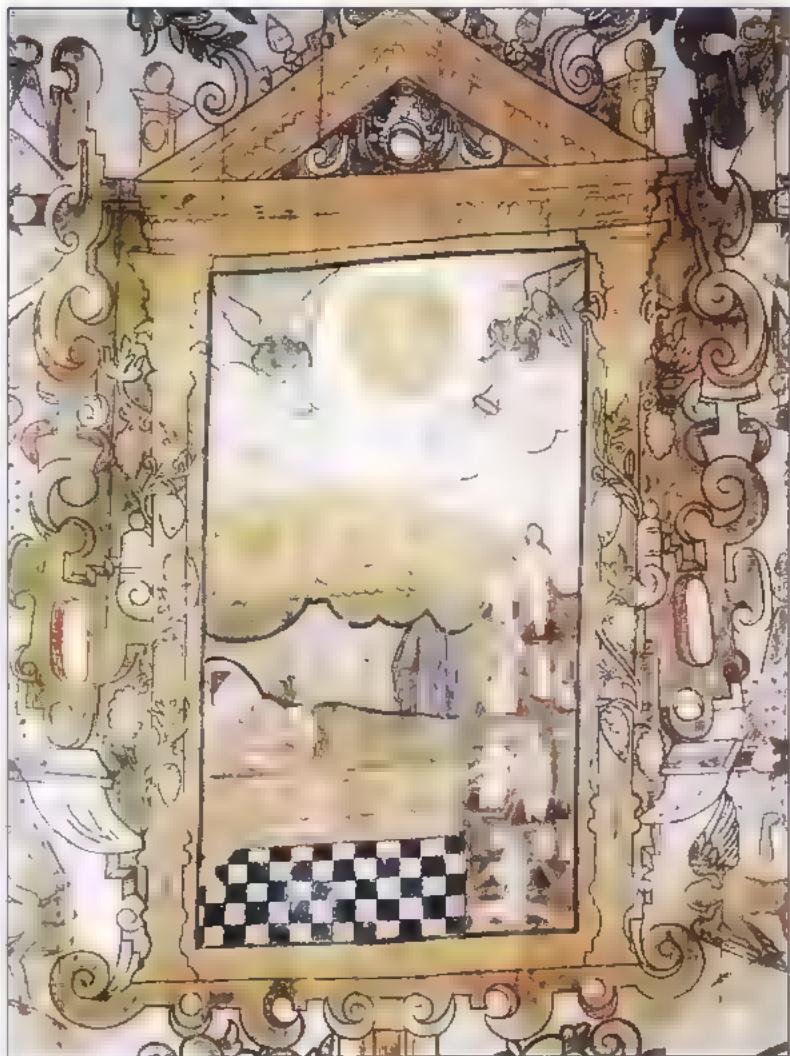
If Antichrist had already arrived in the shape of the papacy, the end was not far off, believed the 17th-century Protestants

**S**o was the Pope really Antichrist? If you were living in 16th or 17th century Scotland, this question was not academic. The Westminster Confession, cornerstone of the Church of Scotland (and still of Free Presbyterianism) said so, and this belief was not confined to Scotland.

It was not academic, because most Protestants actually believed that the Pope was Antichrist. But on the other hand it was, because Scotland's greatest scholars also believed it. They believed, on the basis of Catholic successes, that the Apocalypse was imminent. If Antichrist himself had already arrived in the shape of the papacy, the end could not be far away. With breakthroughs in maths and scriptural interpretation, they believed they could predict the date of that end but they had to hurry, time was short.

Predicting the Apocalypse sounds like a venture on par with predicting a Doomsday asteroid strike on earth. After all, if it can be prevented, why try to predict it? But Scottish scholars believed something could be done, for their side; for godly Protestants.

For the ministers and theologians, it was a race against time – to convert as



■ Last judgement: 17th-century visions of Heaven and Hell at Grandtully Church.

many people as possible, as their analysis told them the end was looming. The country had to repent quickly, to give as many Scots as possible a chance of Heaven and citizenship of the New Jerusalem, rather than being cast directly into Hell's fiery pit.

The expectation of the last days was intertwined with the very birth of the Protestant Church itself. Because the Book of Apocalypse concerned itself so much with the persecution of the godly by the followers of the beast, the early Protestants soon identified the Pope as Antichrist and the Catholic superpowers as the beasts' lieutenants. Hence any advance by European Catholicism was seen as a sign of impending doom.

The biggest outbreak of Apocalyptic frenzy in Scotland came with the Spanish Armada in 1588. The fear was that Scotland would open its back door for the invaders. England and Godly Scots would be put to sword by the Spanish invaders. Unsurprisingly, there was great panic at this prospect.

Even the King, James VI, spent his time writing up sermons on the Book of

Revelations instead of doing anything serious about civil defence. As it happened, the Armada came to naught but not before it had inspired an important work of science fiction: prediction: John Napier of Merchiston's 'A plaine discoverie of the whole revelation of Saint John.'

Napier is remembered for his logarithms and slide rules. What is little known is that the impetus behind these advances came from predictions of the end of the world. His book was a best-seller especially when the Covenanters rebelled against King Charles I. They believed the King was Pro-Catholic and hence in league with Antichrist.

Apocalyptic predictions resurfaced whenever things went badly for the Covenanter movement. The godly believed that when they had suffered enough, God would intervene, sending their tormentors to Hell and taking them straight up to the New Jerusalem.

It was a nice idea for anyone faced with state persecution. It appealed to 17th-century Scots as much as it had appealed to the Early Christians. ■



■ John Napier: inventor of the slide rule and a prophet of doom.



# FESTIVALS OF FIRE AND FUN

■ Up-Helly-Aa, the fieriest frolic of them all: In Lerwick, Shetland, the last day of Yule is celebrated with the spectacular burning of a 'Viking' longship.

**Ceremonies and rituals have been essential to the the rhythms of human life since it began, and the Scots have more than their fair share of them**

The need to acknowledge and celebrate the rhythms of life embraces not only the cycle of the seasons, but also the rites of passage which touch on our lives – birth and adolescence, coming of age, courtship and marriage, death and burial.

Sacred or secular, from religious observations like Easter to commemorative occasions such as Burns suppers, there is a wealth of celebrations on the Scottish calendar to lift spirits during winter's drab days and enhance the joys of summer.

Etymologically, the term

festival is derived from the Latin *festum* – for 'public joy, merriment, revelry' – and from *feria*, meaning abstinence from work in honour of the gods.

Modern understanding might incorporate religious or secular celebration, marked by special observances, or the annual commemoration of a notable person or event. To put it simply, when customs are associated with holidays, they become calendar customs; and when observed annually by a community, they are festivals.

Some involve a temporary

suspension or relaxation of the usual norms and rules – if not the complete negation of the social order, 'turning the world upside down' – while others reinforce those same societal norms.

What they share is a repetitive character which provides a pattern, order, continuity and predictability to life. Their enduring nature and underlying structure connects the past, present, and future, dissolving the boundaries between history and time. They unite fellow celebrants, connecting participants in cooperation and a sense of ▶



The Samhain fire at Comrie proved so spectacular and popular that it was borrowed by Edinburgh.

► belonging, both consciously and unconsciously, to the ancestors with whom it all began. Essentially, they are expressive communicative acts, ways by which people present themselves and their culture to one another, and often to the rest of the world.

Historical upheavals and shifts in attitudes have had lasting repercussions on many calendar customs – for example, the introduction of Christianity, the Reformation, and later economic change. From its earliest days, the church thundered against ‘pagan’ celebrations such as Carnivals.

However, rather than trying to ban the festivals, measures which the later Protestant reformers would attempt, the early church decided on compromise. The festivals were allowed to remain on

## The early church allowed the pagan festivals to remain – on condition that they be invested with Christian significance

condition that they be invested with a Christian significance.

The day of Bride, the spring goddess, became Candlemas; Samhain, the day of the dead, was replaced with All Hallows Eve in recognition of the saints; and the winter solstice celebrations became the birthday of Jesus.

The Protestant polemic against festivals was aimed at eradication. Both ecclesiastical and civil records, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries, give many examples of official intolerance to customary folk practices. In 1575 the General Assembly prohibited all holidays except the Sabbath. Another act of 1656 denied the people any form of entertainment on Sunday, the one day of the week when there was a chance to relax. It outlawed “dancing, singing, playing instruments, attending fairs, markets, wakes, revels, wrestling, bowling, ringing bells, feasts, May-poles, gaming, bear baiting, bull baiting or any other sports and pastimes”.

Even the celebration of Christmas was forbidden by the zealous Reformers, though many continued to enjoy the ‘daft days

and risk the consequences. In part, such prejudices were anti-Catholic in sentiment, but they were also indicative of a full-scale attack on folk beliefs and customs.

Judging by the volume of cases brought before the Kirk Session on charges ranging from taking part in a May Day procession, guising and cross-dressing at Halloween, to singing and dancing during Yule, people were extremely reluctant to comply.

Many of Scotland’s festivals are symbolically linked to changing seasons. On the four Quarter Days (Imbolc, Beltane, Lugnasa, Samhain) and at midsummer and midwinter solstices occult influences were believed to be especially strong.

One of the most enduring of these is the Samhain fire. At the end of the year, bonfires are lit in

the dark as the sun’s power wanes. At Samhain the normal world order was suspended, the barriers between the natural and the supernatural temporarily lifted,

leaving the spirits of the dead free to wander into the realm of the living. It was thus necessary to take certain precautions, such as wearing a disguise so as not to be recognised by the spirits; for while one might look forward to this night as a chance to communicate with, and pay respects to, the ancestors, one did not want to join them.

If Samhain solemnised winter coming as a time of decay, impotence and remembrance of the dead, Beltane celebrated the coming of summer and the return of vegetation and life. Kindled at dawn, the fires of the sun were kept burning. These days continue to be a time of life and death.

Bonfires and fire are often seen in nature – that is, used to ward off evil. The custom of fire has persisted in some festivals still celebrated today, though some are by no means ancient in origin, dating only as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries.

On Hogmanay at Comrie, Perthshire, there is a Flambeaux Procession. Torches are lit in the village square at midnight, walked round the town, and returned to the square for a bonfire. When the flames have died down, the remains are thrown into the River Earn. At Stonehaven, near Aberdeen, baskets suspended from long wire ropes are lit and whirled through the High



To a haggis: the Burns supper is a relatively modern ritual.



Street to the harbour. The villagers of Burghead in Moray carry out the 'Burning of the Clavie' on January 11. The clavie, possibly a corruption of the Gaelic *clabhd* meaning basket, is made from a barrel base, mounted on a pole, and filled with tar-soaked wood. Lit with a burning peat by the clavie king, it is then processed through the town to a mound called the Doorie to burn for a while before being broken into pieces.

In Lerwick, Shetland, the last day of Yule is celebrated with the most spectacular, though relatively modern, winter fire festival of them all - Up-Helly-Aa. Each year a newly built replica Viking longship is wheeled through the streets, and taken to a designated spot to be fired by folk dressed as Vikings. The notion of burning a ship proved so popular that as recently as the late 1990s Edinburgh appropriated it and started its own 'tradition' of mock Viking conflagration.

Seasonal changes are by no means the only times to have merited the

customary attentions of the Scots. From early June onwards, a series of Borders festivals known as 'Riding the Marches' begins. The main feature of these ceremonial ridings is to demarcate the boundaries of burgh common lands. At one time such land was used by the whole community for cutting peats, grazing cattle, and so forth so it was in everyone's interest to guard against unlawful encroachments. The oldest of the Common Ridings, such as at Hawick and Selkirk, were initiated after the battle of Flodden (1513). 'Braw Lads Day' in Galashiels began as recently as 1930.

Individuals are sometimes the focus of patriotic attention. William Wallace Day in Elderslie pays homage to the national hero.

St Andrew's Day feasts were held at the court of King James IV.

The first Burns Supper took place, traditionally at Greenock, shortly after the bard's death.

Fishing communities have also instituted their own celebrations.

notably the extraordinary 'Burry Man' of South Queensferry. One of the most remarkable and mysterious of festivals, it was possibly instigated as a ritual to ensure the prosperity of the herring season. One lucky individual is selected to be covered head to toe in burrs and led on an arduous seven mile trek through the streets.

The impact of the seasons is no longer be as meaningful for us today as it was in the past. If it's cold, we can turn up the heating, when it's dark we can turn on the lights, and if we are hungry we can visit the supermarket. But the desire to acknowledge the passage of time remains.

Customs express a culture's spirit, outlook and mood. They reinforce cohesion within society. But they are not a static repetition of tradition. Festivals and calendar customs develop and grow, die out or are reborn and reinvented in tune with the people who celebrate them.

## SCOTLAND'S CALENDAR CUSTOMS

### JANUARY

- 1 New Year's Day
  - 6 Twelfth Night
  - 6 Au d Yule
  - 11 Auld New Year's Eve  
Burning the Clavie, Burghead
  - 25 Burns Night
- Last Tuesday: Up-Helly Aa, Lerwick Shetland

### FEBRUARY

- 1 Imbolc (St. Brigid's Day)
- 2 Candlemas
- 14 St. Valentine's Day
- Shrove Tuesday: Hand Ba' Game, Jedburgh

### MARCH

- 1 Whuppit Stourie, Lanark

### APRIL

- 1 Hunt the Gowk (April Fool's Day)
- Mid-April: Kate Kennedy Procession St. Andrews; Links Market, Kirkcaldy Easter

### MAY

- 1 Be tane (May Day)
- 15 Whitsun

### JUNE

- 21 Summer Solstice
- Thursday of first full week: Hawick Common Riding
- Lanimer Day, Lanark
- Friday after second Monday: Selkirk Common Riding
- Last Friday: Langholm Common Riding
- Last week: Guid Nychbours Day, Dumfries
- Mid-June: Marymass Saturday, Irvine
- Bannockburn Day, Stirling

### JULY

- Third week: St. Ronan's Cleikum Ceremony, Innerleithen
- Third Saturday: Festival of Herring Queen, Eyemouth, Berwickshire

### AUGUST

- 1 Lughnasa (Lammas)
- 23 Wallace Day Elderslie
- First Thursday: Hat and Ribbon Race Inverkeithing
- Second Friday: The Burry Man, South Queensferry, West Lothian
- Third or fourth Thursday: Red Horse Race, Carnwath, Lanarkshire

### SEPTEMBER

- 29 Michaelmas
- First Saturday: Braemar Highland Games

### OCTOBER

- 31 Halloween/Samhain
- Second week: Riding of the Marches, Elgin, Inverness-shire

### NOVEMBER

- 1 All Saints Day
- 11 Martinmas
- 30 St Andrew's Day

### DECEMBER

- 21 Winter Solstice
- 25 Christmas/Yule
- 31 Hogmanay
- Flambeaux Procession, Comrie, Perthshire
- Swinging the Freballs, Stonehaven, Kincardineshire

# Out of Africa: the man they gave up for dead

**As a courageous explorer, Mungo Park had a life of high adventure – but also of real value to those who sought his knowledge of faraway places**

Mungo Park was one of the most remarkable explorers Scotland has ever produced. Like David Livingstone after him, he lived for Africa – and ultimately died for it. Park was an astoundingly brave pioneer who delved so far into the then unknown continent that he was given up for dead by his friends and family at home. Yet he lived long enough to experience some fantastic adventures and to provide the rest of the world with hugely useful information about the landscape, culture and people of West Africa.

Mungo Park was born one of 14 children at Fowlshie, near Selkirk, in 1771. His parents wanted him to enter the church, but he was more interested in medicine and instead went to Edinburgh University to train as a surgeon. After qualifying as a doctor, he headed for London, where he managed to get a job as an assistant surgeon on a vessel trading with the East Indies.

The ship's journeys took him to Sumatra, where he used his extensive knowledge of plant and animal life to collect botanical and scientific data which he then brought back to Britain. These studies won him the backing of the newly-formed Africa



■ Mungo Park recovered from fever to make his way home – via America.

Association, which was looking for an explorer to attempt to find the source of the River Niger. Park agreed to undertake the trip and in 1795 sailed for the Gambia in West Africa.

He made his way up the Gambia River for 200 miles until he crossed into the then unknown territory of the Senegal River basin. Travelling light – he had only six Africans as companions and carried little more than the most basic equipment and gifts for barter – he soon ran into difficulties. His party caught fever and he was captured and imprisoned by an Arab chief for four months.

Undeterred, Park managed to escape and continued on his journey with little more than a horse and a

compass. He reached the upper section of the Niger (in present-day Mali) and mapped it before being forced to turn back because of a lack of supplies. As he made his way back to the coast by foot over mountainous terrain, he succumbed to fever and lay dangerously ill for seven months, seeking the aid of a slave trader before returning to the Gambia.

Even then, his adventure was far from over. Park's captors refused to take him home, so he had to walk 1,000 miles across the desert to Timbuktu, half a year after his original departure. When he finally arrived, he was

When he returned, he had been wintered off as lead, but he arrived early in the morning and

waited until a decent hour before presenting himself at the London door of his astonished brother-in-law.

Park's record of the trip was published in his work *Travels Into the Interior of Africa*. This made him famous, but he was content to settle back into relative anonymity by returning to the Borders and taking up a job as a local doctor. He married and practised medicine in Peebles, striking up a friendship with the great Scots novelist Sir Walter Scott, who at the time was Sheriff of Selkirkshire.

It wasn't long, however, before the lure of Africa returned. In 1804, he was asked by the government to mount a second expedition to the Niger. This time, though, the trip was to be much better resourced – there were to be 40 Europeans in the party, many of them from the military. However, this expedition quickly turned out to be even more of a disaster than the first. Dysentery struck early, and 29 of the adventurers died before ever reaching the Niger.

Despite the adversity and horrendous conditions, Park and the remaining members of the party pressed on. They ventured up an unexplored river by canoe, eventually reaching the coast eventually.

The end finally came at Busua, in present-day Ghana, when Park and all the remaining members of the party, were

it is not known what tragic end for a leader he had shown remarkable leadership qualities, and it is not much to begin the exploration of Africa – a process that would be continued by David Livingstone later in the century.

The fact that Park is not as well known as Livingstone does not diminish his achievements. He was a fine explorer, and is still remembered with great respect and affection. This is particularly true in his native Borders, where a statue to him by the sculptor Sir Thomas Clapperton stands in Selkirk High Street. It helps to ensure that the memory of one of our greatest explorers lives on. ■

# REMEMBERED BY HIS OWN GAZELLE

## Joseph Thomson blazed new trails with charm

Joseph Thomson was yet another Scot drawn to the irresistible beauty of Africa – but to a different part than that which Park helped open up. Thomson, who came from Penpont near Dumfries, was born in 1868 and made his name as the first European to reach several parts of East Africa.

After studying science at Edinburgh University, he joined the Royal Geographical Society's 1878 expedition to Africa as a botanist and geologist. The plan was to find a way from Dar-es-Salaam to Lake Tanganyika – but in its early stages the expedition's leader, Alexander Keith Johnston, died.

Thomson, who was only 21, took command and pushed forward to Lake Tanganyika until his party was driven back by hostile tribesmen. But he made important scientific expeditions before returning to the coast.

In 1882, he returned to Africa, this time to try to find the shortest route from Zanzibar through to Uganda. He travelled unarmed on the dangerous journey through Masai country and managed to

visit two of Africa's greatest mountains – Kenya and Kilimanjaro.

When Joseph Thomson finally returned home, he received the prestigious Founder's Medal from the Royal Geographical Society. He undertook further daring expeditions to such faraway places as the Atlas Mountains of Morocco and Northern Rhodesia.

Unfortunately, he suffered from the problem faced by many explorers – failing health at a relatively early age – and died soon after returning to his native Scotland in 1891.

Thomson was a gentle but tenacious man who preferred charm to conflict, which is perhaps how he succeeded in making his way through dangerous areas of the African continent without coming to serious harm.

Joseph Thomson's memory lives on today in an unlikely but powerful way – the most common gazelle of East Africa, Thomson's Gazelle, is named after him.



■ Fascinated by faraway places: Joseph Thomson's exploring earned him a Royal Geographical Society medal.

# A mission that led to marriage



■ The rugged mountains of Tibet: Scots explorer George Bogle was enchanted by their beauty.

## Sent to Tibet, George Bogle fell in love with both land and native

George Bogle was among the first Britons ever to reach the remote mountain state of Tibet – and in doing so, he quickly fell in love with the country and its people.

Bogle, who was born at Bothwell in Lanarkshire in 1746, was employed by the East India Company and chosen to lead a mission to Tibet. His party was the first from Britain ever to cross the Himalayas.

Bogle spent six months in the country, married a Tibetan, and became enchanted with the simplicity and beauty of the country and its people.

He returned to the country in 1776 and again the following year, and was finally asked to open a mission there in 1779, though he died in 1781 before this could be achieved.

His efforts to understand the local culture helped in fostering relationships between the two nations and also gave people in the West a greater understanding of Tibet's culture, religion and people.

# SHOT IN THE BACK FROM THE HILLS



The drama of the Appin Murder happened beside the far shore (in this picture) of Loch Linnhe – in the area of the thin white cloud on the right.

**It is known as the the Appin Murder and the wrong man hanged for it. Nearly 250 years later, the real killer of Colin (Red Fox) Campbell is yet to be identified. But of suspects there is no shortage...**

*There came a shot from a firelock from higher up the hill; and with the very sound of it Glenure fell upon the road. "Oh, I am dead!" he cried...*

That was how Robert Louis Stevenson described the shooting of government agent Colin Campbell – the 'Red Fox' – in Kidnapped. It was late afternoon on May 14, 1752. The shot, fired from a concealed position above the little birchwood of Lettermore in Appin, Argyll, beside the shores of Loch Linnhe, struck Colin Campbell in the back, set in process a chain of events that reverberated to the highest places in the land, and created a murder mystery that is argued over to this day.

It was only six years before that the Stewarts had cast their dice for the last time and it had come to a red end on Culloden Moor.

The Highlands, as one writer put it, were in a lull between hurricanes. Memories of 'Butcher' Cumberland and his slaughterers were vivid, tartans and weapons were proscribed,

poverty engulfed the defeated.

Appin was Stewart country and its chief, Ardshiel, who was 'out' in the '45, had been charged with treason. He took to the heather then found refuge in France, but his estates were forfeited along with those of chieftain neighbours Cameron of Lochiel and Cameron of Callart.

Colin Campbell, of nearby Glenure, who was on the victorious Government side, was appointed factor to collect the rents from these three estates and some tenants faced eviction.

So the tinderbox Appin Murder scene was set – among some of Scotland's most magnificent mountain country.

The three main characters were James Stewart, Ardshiel's natural cousin, who farmed in Glen Duror on the Ardshiel estates and was known locally as James of the Glen to distinguish him from the many other Stewarts in the area. He was appointed guardian to Ardshiel's family. James was an upright, intelligent and dignified



A classic edition of Kidnapped by Robert Louis Stevenson – in which he gives his account of the puzzling murder of Red Fox.



■ 'Oh, I am dead!' cried Glenure as he reeled from a single shot that rang out from higher ground. He was helped to the ground and died in half-an-hour.

man who kept calm in a desperate situation of persecution, poverty and hate.

**Colin Campbell**, on the other side – but of the same Highland-gentleman breed – had a reputation for courage, fairness, chivalry and even kindness. It may have been these attributes that brought his own loyalty to the Crown under suspicion in high Government circles. As neighbours, Glenure and James of the Glen knew and respected each other well.

The third principal character remains nameless, but it was his hand that pulled the trigger that murdered Glenure and sent James to the gallows.

On the afternoon of the murder, Colin Campbell crossed into Appin by the ferry at the narrows of Loch Leven after the evictions of some Cameron tenants. With him were his nephew Mungo Campbell, servant Ewan Mackenzie and sheriff's officer Donald Kennedy.

As they made their way along the old road – Kennedy in front on foot, Glenure and Mungo riding abreast behind him and Mackenzie some way in the rear – a single shot rang out from higher ground.

Immediately Glenure cried out some such words as: "Oh, I am dead. He's going to shoot you. Take care of yourselves." He was helped to the ground by Mungo and died

half-an-hour later. Mungo ordered Mackenzie to take the fastest horse and ride to Kentallen where rooms were booked, but there was no one there and he galloped on to Aucharn, the home of James of the Glen.

James's reaction was shock, then anguish because he knew what was certain to follow – innocent or not, he represented the Stewart leadership, a price would have to be paid, and it would most likely be with his neck.

Two days later, James of the Glen was arrested. By today's standards his trial was a mockery of justice which the late High Court judge, Lord Cameron, once described as "the blackest mark on Scotland's legal history". Eleven Campbells sat on the jury in Inverary, the capital of Campbell country, yet set against the times it was arguably as fair a trial as he could expect.

James was found guilty 'art and part' and hanged on the little knoll above the Ballachulish Hotel where the new bridge has now replaced the ancient ferry.

In his Dying Speech, which was delivered with dignity and restraint, he continued to claim innocence. It bears the ring of truth. The words on the cairn, where the gallows stood, say simply: 'Executed on this spot for a crime of

which he was not guilty'.

So who was guilty? In spite of intensive inquiries, there were no other arrests. In his trial preognition Mungo stated that he saw a figure up the hill with a gun in his hand, but didn't think that this was the person who fired the shot. That is the only clue. But there are suspects aplenty.

Leading the list is Allan Breck Stewart, who in real life bore no resemblance to RLS's swashbuckling hero in *Kidnapped*. Allan Breck was shifty, a deserter and no lover of Campbells and certainly capable of such a crime. But there is no firm evidence – and would he really have been so foolish as to commit such a murder in his own patch to bring inevitable grief to his clan?

There were others under suspicion but again there was an absence of convictable evidence. But what

about the four Camerons who rowed across Loch Leven into Appin before the shooting and vanished. Who were they? Where did they go? The Camerons certainly had motive enough. In the murder investigation they remain unaccounted for.

Just as easily, the murderer could have been from another clan, someone with a grudge, possibly going back to Culloden when Glenure identified some clansmen who might otherwise have gone free.

Or was it all a local plot in which the names of those involved were locally known but kept secret by clan loyalty ever since? It is even said that the name of the real murderer has been handed down from one generation to another in Appin to this day. But after 250 years, the unanswered questions remain and the arguments continue. ■



■ A cairn marks the death spot – with plaque bearing the date and victim's name.

THIS CAIRN IS ERECTED  
ON THE SPOT WHERE  
**COLIN CAMPBELL**  
OF GLENURE  
WAS MURDERED ON  
14TH MAY 1752

# INTO ETERNITY WITH HIS MORTAL ENEMY



■ Exquisite craftsmanship: the effigy of Montrose that lies in St Giles, Edinburgh, not far from the tomb of his great enemy, Argyll.

**T**he Marquis of Montrose is remembered for the 'Year of the Battles' when, under his strong leadership, his ill-equipped and usually-outnumbered men always seemed incapable of anything but complete victory.

The first of these fights was at Tibbermore – sometimes referred to as Tippermuir – where Montrose's army was outnumbered more than two to one. Most of his men had no better weapons than stones to throw, but they charged and broke their enemy's lines, and the slaughter continued to the streets of Perth itself. The battle site is close to the busy A9, near the roundabout south-west of Perth where the A9 and M90 meet. The field of the main conflict is by the row of pylons north of Lamberkine Farm.

Perhaps Montrose's most famous victory was at the Battle of Inverlochy. As is mentioned elsewhere in this issue,

this battle is remembered not just for the fight itself but for the astonishing march that took place before it.

The battle was fought a little north of Fort William, before the ruins of Inverlochy Castle. This old castle, which stands between the A82 and the River Lochy, was built by the Comyn family in the 1200s. Its many illustrious visitors have included Robert Bruce.

There is a modern hotel nearby that also bears the name 'Inverlochy Castle', so make sure, if visiting, that you have chosen the right building!

The beginning of the end for Montrose came with his capture at Ardvreck Castle. The ruins of Ardvreck stand just north of Inchnadamff, between the A837 and Loch Assynt, and are familiar to drivers heading for the far north of Scotland.

Montrose was executed in the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, beside where the Mercat Cross stands today. His body



**Not even Montrose could avoid the final defeat and a final irony, says biker historian David Ross**

was cut to pieces to be displayed in various Scottish cities, but in later years as much as possible was gathered and buried with ceremony in Edinburgh's St Giles Cathedral in 1661.

These remains lie in a small vault reached by a staircase under the Chepman Aisle, on the church's south side beside the organ.

Above stands a memorial erected by his descendants in 1888, which is probably the finest effigy and monument ever erected in Scotland.

The craftsmanship is quite exquisite. Probably very few visitors to Edinburgh know of its existence, but it is well worth viewing.

Montrose's great enemy, Argyll, is also buried in St Giles. His tomb stands at the opposite, or north, side of the church, against the Royal Mile.

It is ironic that two men who were poles apart should face eternity within the same building. ■

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Centre, p16/17/18/19 Witch Burning: Preussischer; Newes from Scotland; Fotomas; Bellarmine (Jug): Michael Holford, p20 Last Judgement: St Mary's, Grandtully; Lord John Napier; University of Edinburgh, p21/22 Lithgow's Works: Lanark Library, p23/24/25 Stonehaven and Burghead: Marjory Stephen, p28/29 Kidnapped Book Cover: Robert Louis Stevenson; Murder of Red Fox: Norman MacDonald.

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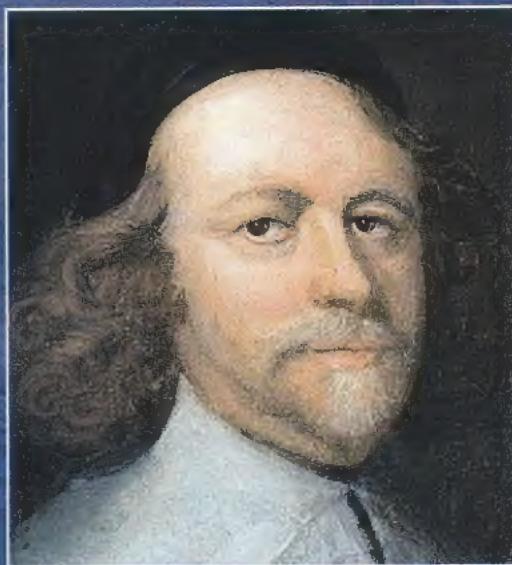
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# SCOTLAND'S STORY

NEXT WEEK IN Part 24

## AN ORIGINAL SPIN DOCTOR



Few have heard of him, but Archibald Johnston of Wariston was a force to reckon with when The Tables, a provisional Scottish government, faced the wrath of King Charles I. The Edinburgh lawyer was the movement's rapid-rebuttal specialist – or spin doctor. Read all about him in the next issue.

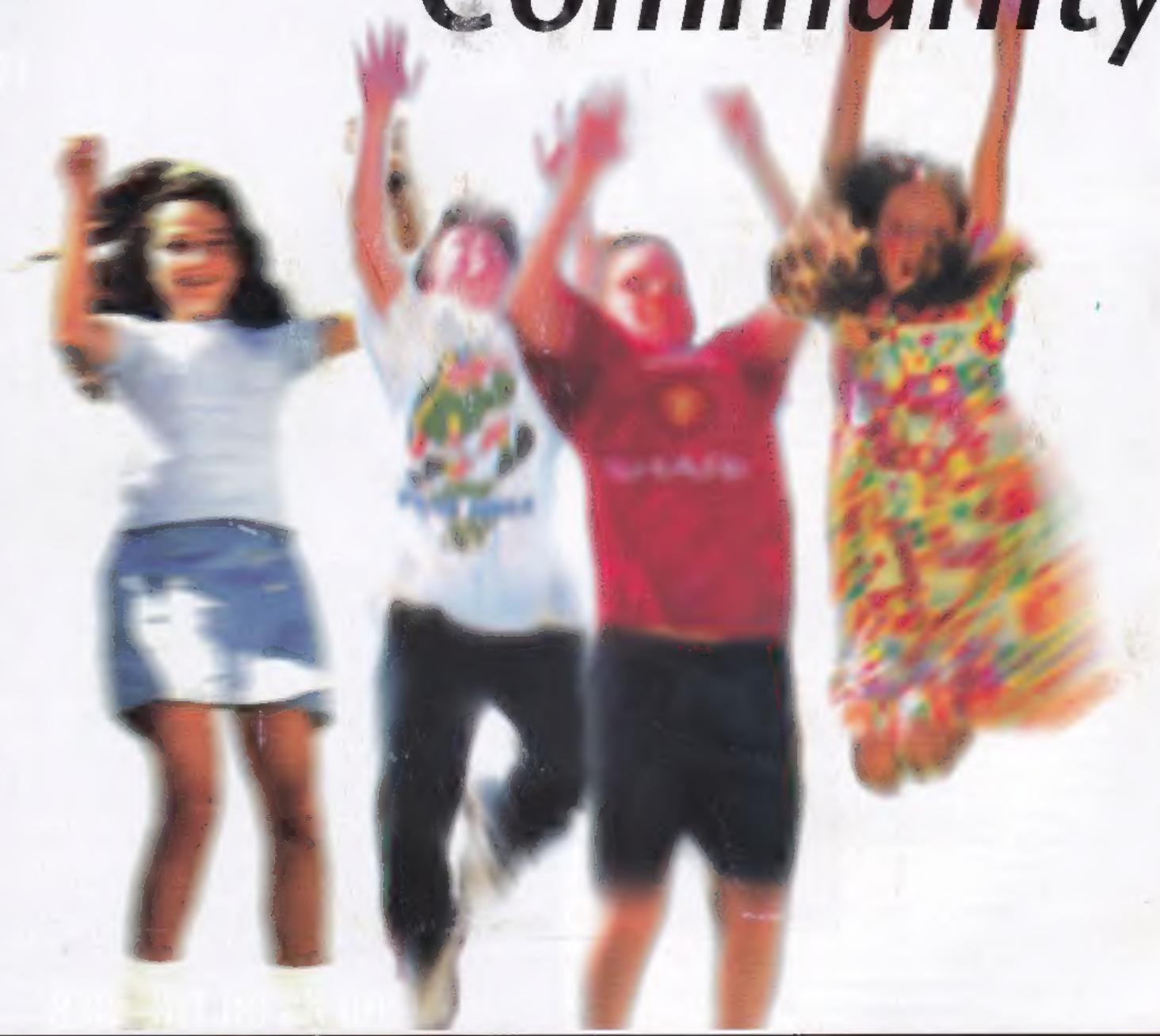
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